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Viet Teams Copy Red Trickery

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SAIGON — At Tu Thuan village in mountainous Quang Ngai province, a Viet Cong courier was shot on a lonely jungle path.

It was a routine killing, but a piece of paper found on the courier's body was of more than passing interest. It read:

"I herewith inform you about the present situation of villages in our district and the results of winning the people's hearts.

"Concerning the military situation of the enemy, they have organized one special section with the assistance of the American invaders. Most of the soldiers of this unit are outstanding. Their plan of operation is good. They usually launch an ambush right in our control zone with a small unit, based on information furnished by spies.

"I am studying the method of reaction to this unit. It is dangerous to meet this section. If the situation is not corrected, our activity will be hurt. This letter will be sent to you through Mr. Hoang. Good luck."

THE Vietnamese counter-guerrilla read the letter with grim amusement, for it was about him and the "special section." The Viet Cong could

This is the second of several articles on a new kind of military force in Viet Nam.

hardly have written a better testimonial to a budding counterinsurgency project called PATs — short for People's Action Teams.

Three months later, the Viet Cong sent a battalion to liquidate a particularly troublesome PAT in the Tu Nghia district of the same province. Surprise is usually the trademark of a Viet Cong attack. But not this time. Through its own intelligence network, the PAT had three hours' warning.

THE MEN slipped out of their camouflage uniforms into black pajamas, the traditional garb of the Vietnamese peasant. By the time the Viet Cong arrived, the PAT had faded into the population — just like the Viet Cong do when government troops arrive.

Some stood around watching impassively as the Viet Cong leaders questioned village leaders. Some were hiding in the big earthenware water jugs found outside every Vietnamese peasant home. Some lay on rafters with rifles ready.

When the VC launched a house-to-house search, gunfire broke out in another part of the village. When the VC rushed to the scene, firing was heard from still another spot. At dawn, the harricid Communists withdrew, leaving behind 67 dead, 1 47-mm. recoilless rifle, 1 radio and 17 individual rifles. Total PAT losses: four dead and three wounded.

THIS success was to be repeated again and again. To the bewildered Viet Cong, it was as though the tables had been turned on them. They had — with a vengeance. The PAT counter guerrilla tactics were straight from the Communist handbook.

The PATs were born out of an urgent need for military intelligence on Viet Cong movements. Nobody planned the PATs. They had their beginnings in the dark days of December, 1963, after the overthrow of the Diem regime.

The U.S. Central Intelligence Agency had organized APAS (Advanced Political Action Teams), five-man teams of para-military partisans with a primary mission to gather intelligence by winning the friendship and confidence of the peasants. But the APAs were too small to be effective. Nor did they have enough firepower to stay in a village and fight off the Viet Cong.

MEANWHILE, in Quang Ngai province, long notorious as a Communist stronghold, the police chief of Quang Ngai City had about 40 friends or relatives who wanted gainful employment. Some of them were disillusioned ex-Viet Cong, some were war veterans. The police chief wanted to use this motley group for intelligence gathering, but the question was how.

He took his problem to Frank Scotton, 27, of Needham, Mass., a tall, lean U.S. Information Service field representative who spoke flu-

ent Vietnamese. Scotton was immediately interested and drew up a political indoctrination program, unashamedly lifting bodily from proven Communist doctrine.

Scotton sought money and supplies from Bob Kelly, an offbeat Irishman who was province representative for the U.S. AID mission.

EXPERT scroungers both, they were doing all right until they came up against the problem of weapons. The U.S. Army flatly refused to give them any. It was then that Scotton went to the CIA. After taking a good look at the project, CIA men decided it was worth a try and agreed to supply the weapons.

The first PAT — they were known as "special commandos" at the beginning — was composed of 47 men. They were equipped with 3 BARs (Browning automatic rifles), 9 M-1 rifles with grenade launchers, 5 submachineguns, 17 .45-caliber automatic pistols and 1 PRC-10 radio.

With this modest arsenal, they proceeded to write history.